

WELCOME 16th April 2023 – 2nd SUNDAY IN EASTER '23 A

1 Peter 1:1-12

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups** on Friday @ 1p.m.

As we move into this week... Death, taxes...gravity...a handful of other physical or scientific certainties...*maybe?* Everything else – *EVERYTHING ELSE* – seems up for grabs. Or so the wisdom of the world would say... **"To** be uncertain is to be uncomfortable, but to be certain is to be ridiculous." Socrates (ca 450 BC) or in my lifetime **"The** only unchangeable certainty in life is that *nothing is unchangeable or certain.*" John F. Kennedy

And...How do you know? Certain or not? H-D-Y-K?

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again into a living hope, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead & into a priceless inheritance — an inheritance kept in heaven, pure & undefiled, beyond the reach of change & decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see.

Every word Peter writes is grounded in the certainty of the risen Jesus. This is our "new normal" that began the day Jesus rose from the dead. It's living gripped by the reality & eternal security of life in & w/ Jesus forever. It's living grounded in a promise already being fulfilled. This new normal is a living hope equipping us to live through difficulty, thrive through suffering, & endure hardship w/ conviction because the good news of the resurrection strengthens & transforms everything about us.

Remember...Biblical hope is not some pipe dream wish-upon-a-star punt or starry-eyed optimism...Biblical hope **is** a future *certainty* grounded in a present *reality*... that God will have the last word about me/you/the world & that word is the promise that our destiny is life - love - abundant joy that last forever because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

We'll experience & share that today...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord Jesus, We dare to believe in the things we can't see: In your love for us - In your love for those around us - In the hope of eternity. We dare to believe that another world is possible & that suffering can end & that we can play a role in the kingdom to come. We dare to believe in heaven on earth & in the light that scatters darkness & in your justice made complete. Jesus through you we believe all things will be made new...in you we pray to believe that all things are possible also in us. Amen

Let's Sing of the Lord's Goodness...

FAITH CHAT:

1. Where in the world today do you feel like a "stranger, foreigner or alien"? What do you do about that?
2. How does the assurance of life in Christ effect how you live each day? What might be different without that assurance?

2ND SUNDAY IN EASTER '23 A – THE NEW NORMAL: LIVING IN CERTAINTY

I can do this forever. Well not really because I would get bored faster than you will... but I can do this & never have to see the result to know what will happen. Here. Outside. You can drive home & do it there. The result will always be the same. Something that has some mass/weight to it falls, & given ever-present gravity... It hits the ground. It's constant...fixed...certain & sure. Gravity is a fixed reference point.

Fixed reference points...constant/certain...are essential. Pilots use them. Sailors too. Stars. Mountains. Rivers. Satellites. Fixed reference points provide certainty & enable us to know where we are...what direction we are heading...guide from place to place. In business, engineering, architecture fixed reference points are called "standards" & give a baseline by which all things are measured.

We even want our relationships to have that kind of certainty...constancy...trustworthy reliability. Here today & gone tomorrow is not what we want in a spouse or friend...Dr or plumber...banker or employer. We may at some level agree w/ Pres Kennedy... **"The** only unchangeable certainty in life is that *nothing is unchangeable or certain.*" But I climb on an airplane, I like to be certain the pilot's up to the task. If I open wide I want to know the dentist knows...If I say "I do" I want to have no doubt you **do** too. *"Nothing is certain" is no way to live...Make it up as you go along...decide what's true for you is a recipe for disaster...especially if life gets rocky...tragedy or heartache show up...loved one dies, accident happens, something slams into us that doesn't seem fair...No one wants to live **on** a wobble board...we don't want life to be a constant earthquake...Fixed reference points...constant/certain...are essential.*

Which is precisely why Peter writes this letter. He writes to folks for whom very little was secure or fixed. Written about 30 years after the death/rez/↑ of Jesus, Peter writes he says to **"God's** *chosen people who are living as foreigners in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.*" (basically the whole of Turkey/Asia Minor) People scattered by Roman persecution to the point of being dispersed across Europe/Asia. These aren't just men/women who felt like it was a good idea to say *"I'm a Xn"* or who once in a while did something Jesus-y. These people gave up everything to follow Jesus & the world around 'em hated them for it. Life was hard & they needed something they could hang on to that would give them some assurance – some hope – that their trust in Jesus was right...not lied to...tricked...conned...

The quest for hope in pain is a universal human experience. Troubles trials pain expose where our *hope* lies...For many, we just *hope* things get better. Illness goes away. New job. New partner. New circumstance. You know...I've been **mis-using** the word "hope" (like we often do) as a synonym for wishing or wanting. Remember

hope is not some pipe dream wish-upon-a-star punt or starry-eyed optimism... Biblical hope **is** a future *certainty* grounded in a present *reality*...Present reality **God** *the Father knew you & chose you long ago, & his Spirit has made you holy.* Peter points to a fixed certain reality...true...God has from forever been determined that not one of his human masterpieces should be lost forever...God looks on the world he has created in his love for his love & sees you as someone worth the very life of his Son so that **you** can trust God in all things for all things in spite of anything. Even before he made the world, God loved us & chose us in Christ to be holy & without fault in his eyes. That seems impossible when so much of life is not in your control. When the world around us appears or feels chaotic. When so much of what we used to trust & know is challenged & threatened. When you feel lost - anonymous – insignificant - beat down.

Then Peter makes it even more decisive...**"All** *praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again into a living hope because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead...*" Peter points to the empty tomb...**that which is surer & more certain than gravity**...the decisive/triumphal event in the life of Christ for the life of the world Heb. 6 calls a *"strong & trustworthy anchor for our souls."* Peter says "Because of Easter/rez...Since the rez is true...since the rez means the life/love/glory of God has triumphed over sin/death/evil...since the tomb is empty & Christ is alive - life breaks through in you who are grasped by the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ & you can trust God in all things for all things in spite of anything." The One who has been faithful from eternity to eternity - The One who raised Christ from the dead – The One who opens the grave so all who believe can walk from death into life unending can be trusted to be faithful today...right now...in the face of whatever you are experiencing. Stop "hoping things get better" & start trusting Christ will transform you for the better even if your situation stays the same. Jn 5:24

For reasons known only in the depth of God's love...the Father, in eternity past chose you to be His child; chose you to be the recipient of His saving grace. Through no merit of your own, no deserving of your own, no distinction of your own: God chose you! Present reality: Jesus gave his life - shed his blood - rose from the grave so the Father could adopt & embrace you as his own beloved child. Right this minute **THAT** is your present reality. Whether you believe it or not...you can walk away from it & choose a different path for your life...but the present certain reality is *God has given us eternal life. This life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life. – 1 Jn 5:11-12* Since that is true...Peter says **"Now** *we have a priceless inheritance – an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure & undefiled, beyond the reach of change & decay.*" Some translations describe our inheritance in Jesus Christ this way: Imperishable, undefiled & unfading. Look

around you...right now...Look! All the people & things in this room. Now think of all your stuff...anything you have at your disposal: animal vegetable or mineral... Sooner or later it wears out, breaks down, dies or goes away. All of our earthly attachments end at the grave except those that are connected to Jesus by his death/rez/trust in his promises. Everything from this world can & will be lost... Nothing of this world is imperishable, undefiled or unfading...Nothing. Dust it all is & to dust it shall all return. That's not meant to depress or scare you...just reality. But the greater deeper stronger reality is...God raised Jesus from the dead...Right in the midst of the worst we can imagine or this world can dream up we are called to cling to that one thing that is imperishable, undefiled & unfading: Jesus Christ Risen from the dead...ruling over all things in love & holding us in an embrace that cannot be shaken loose.

Living hope is not just some future payoff...pie in the sky...Not only hope beyond this life but hope *IN* this life. vs 6 "So be truly glad There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while." See that? *BE JOYFUL NOW BECAUSE MORE JOY IS COMING...* Joy is not only coming down the track but it's available now, 1st because our struggles trials & sorrows here in this life are only for a little while. Pain – heartache – suffering – struggle - tears are not eternal...a day is coming when all those will be wiped away in the blink of an eye. Those don't last just like my bank acct won't last...like fame won't last ... just like everything else in this world...the present reality which grants us the future certainty wipes away all those things & leaves nothing but joy in the presence of God & the pleasure of living with him forever. What did Jesus say was his purpose, "I came that you might have life & have it abundantly." – Jn 10:10 Life full – complete – whole – healed - radiant – secure - abundant - Now AND later...even when it looks like everything is going off the rails.

2nd because right here & right now "...through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation..." Now when life is on fire...when pear-shaped is an improvement...it may not feel like God is protecting you at all...but at that point we have to see w/ more than our eyes...because at best our eyes will show us only how near & clear & present the current danger is. Our eyes will only show us what we already know...Life sometimes hurts a lot. Life is sometimes harder & scarier than we think we can bear. But hope is a future certainty grounded in a present reality. That present reality is that by you being taken hold of by Jesus is his resurrection...life in Jesus triumphs over all that would tear you down devour or destroy you...Our certainty in Christ is strengthened as it is challenged by the situations circumstances & even the attacks of this world. In that victory, hope is God's gift that is intended to be our way of life.

In the middle of whatever this life brings in all its violent uncertainty; the response from God's people is not hide under the covers, but to be about the business the Father left us to do. Forgiving enemies, praying for our persecutors, giving w/ no strings attached, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting the prisoner, welcoming the stranger...gathering with the family of Jesus-followers in worship & sharing in real & concrete ways the love that has been poured out freely & generously for us. Introducing those who live as strangers to God's grace to Jesus whose very presence among us is grace upon grace...hope upon hope...joy upon joy.

You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy.

In this world increasingly driven by distrust & fear, our hope is the fundamental truth that God will have the last word about me/you/the world & that word is the promise that our destiny is life - love - abundant joy that last forever because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

TAKE IT HOME - Where do you want to see hope flourish in your life this week?
With whom do you want to share it?

Let's pray with that in mind...

Lord Jesus let our hope in you grow in all that we are & in all that we do. Make every word & deed an expression of your life & love given to us. Draw us closer to you & then nearer to those around us so your presence may be shared & your joy multiplied so that your power makes all things new. In your name we pray... Amen